

Transition Tips

What is different about secondary and high school?

The move from primary to secondary or high school can feel like a huge leap.

Not only do children need to find their way around a new school building - they also have to be more independent and responsible for their own learning, handing in homework on time and bringing the right equipment to their lessons.

However, it's not only about the practical stuff - the move to secondary or high school is an emotional leap too!



Children are stepping out of a familiar world into an unfamiliar and complicated one, where they will meet lots of new people who they will have to see and speak to every day – both adults and other children.

As they become teenagers, children's brains and bodies go through some big changes too. These changes make them care a lot more about what others think of them. All of this can mean that the move is a difficult time for some children.

It's not surprising then that children tend to worry a lot about

- **'social' changes** (e.g. making new friends, fitting in, bullying, getting along with the teachers)
- **'practical' changes** (e.g. managing the work, getting lost in school, doing homework on time, travelling to and from school)

Let your child know that it's normal to have mixed feelings. The move is a journey that doesn't end after the first week or half term, so remind them that it may take some time to feel settled in their new school and to feel comfortable with new friends.



Be aware of the physical and emotional changes they are going through, but the important thing is to stay connected to your child and let them know you will be there for them during the ups and downs.

How can I help prepare my child for secondary or high school?

1. Talk about the move with your child.

Try to be positive but realistic about it. The move is a journey that doesn't end after the first week or half term, so remind them that it may take some time to feel settled in their new school and to feel comfortable with new friends. Talk about times in your life when you've gone through changes, such as starting a new job or moving house. Remember to talk about the different feelings, how they changed over time, and how you managed them.



2. Help them feel less worried about the practical stuff as soon as possible.

If your child will be making their own way to and from school, perhaps plan and practise the journey together. Look at the layout of the school building and help them get used to it. Make sure your child has the right uniform and equipment, and try to start routines for before and after school, as well as helpful habits like packing their school bag the night before. Take a photo of your child's timetable on your mobile phone so that you always have a copy to hand.

3. Get your child used to talking about their feelings.

Encourage them to tell you what they like or enjoy about their new school, as well as anything they're worried about. Or they could write their worries down in a 'worry diary', or rate their feelings on a scale or 'worry ladder'. Take their worries seriously and help them find different ways to express their feelings.

4. Help them become problem-solvers.

Talk to them about what they can do about their worries, like speaking to someone at school or home. Help your child work through situations that might be bothering them. For example, if your child is worried about making new friends, practise some conversations together. E.g. "Hello - what school are you from? Do you know the way to the next class?" Becoming a problem-solver can help your child understand that worries can be worked through and might make them feel more in control.

5. Keep an eye out for any changes in your child's behaviour.

Although it's normal for children to be grumpy or moody when they're nervous about a big change, if your child starts behaving very differently, they might be struggling with something. Try to see the bigger picture - what might be causing this? Is it having an effect on other parts of my child's life? If you're worried about your child, don't be afraid to talk to a teacher or pastoral lead at the school.

6. Keep doing the things you enjoy as a family.

Having familiar home routines can be comforting in times of change. Help your child focus on the things that will stay the same or be familiar to them – it might make things less scary!

If you have any worries about your child's move to secondary or high school, talk to staff at their primary school, such as their class teacher, SENCo or Head Teacher. Lots of primary schools help Year 6 and Primary 7 pupils to get ready themselves by planning and preparing for the move. If you are still worried once your child has begun secondary or high school, then contact their form tutor and head of year. The pastoral support team will usually do everything they can to help your child to settle in.

How can I support my child through big changes?

When things are unfamiliar, it can feel exciting but it can also make us feel uncertain, insecure and stressed. Some stress can be useful because it can help to get us ready, but if it gets too much, we might end up feeling overwhelmed and anxious.

How children cope with big changes depends on a lot of things, including their past experiences and age. But adults can help them deal with the feelings that big changes can cause. Whether they're starting school, moving house or moving class - here are some ideas to help them through it.

1. Let them know it's normal to have mixed feelings.

Talk about the different feelings they might have and help them to notice and name them. Ask your child what happens when they feel worried or excited or nervous. Where do they 'feel' the feeling in their body? Remind them that difficult feelings can be helpful and the body's way of preparing for challenges and changes.

2. Talk about worries.

Sometimes when we are going through a big change, we can worry about it and imagine that bad things are going to happen. Encourage children to talk about their thoughts and worries and how these thoughts and worries can make them feel. Remind them that just because they think it, it doesn't mean it will happen! Noticing and talking about it can help them keep it under control.

3. Remember how you've managed in the past.

Talk about times when they have coped with change and what helped them through it. Share some of your experiences too. Think about things like moving house and starting a new club or job. How did you say goodbye to the old situations, people and places? What helped you move towards new ones? Can you remember your feelings and how you managed them?

4. Make it more familiar.

Help the unfamiliar thing feel more familiar by talking about it and what is likely to happen. Encourage them to draw pictures or make a story about the change. Think of things they can do to be organised and prepared and try to set up new routines as soon as you can. Remember to keep some familiar things going as well - especially the things your child enjoys.

5. Practise relaxing.

Practise how to relax together so your child sees how to deal with difficult feelings in a healthy way. Help children think about how to stay calm and find out what works for them. Encourage them to make a box or a book full of these ideas and activities that they can use when they're feeling overwhelmed.

Helpful links

There are many other organisations who can help you and your child get ready for secondary or high school. See below for more practical advice, resources and information for families about this big step.

- www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk
- www.youngminds.org.uk
- www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2019/starting-secondary-school